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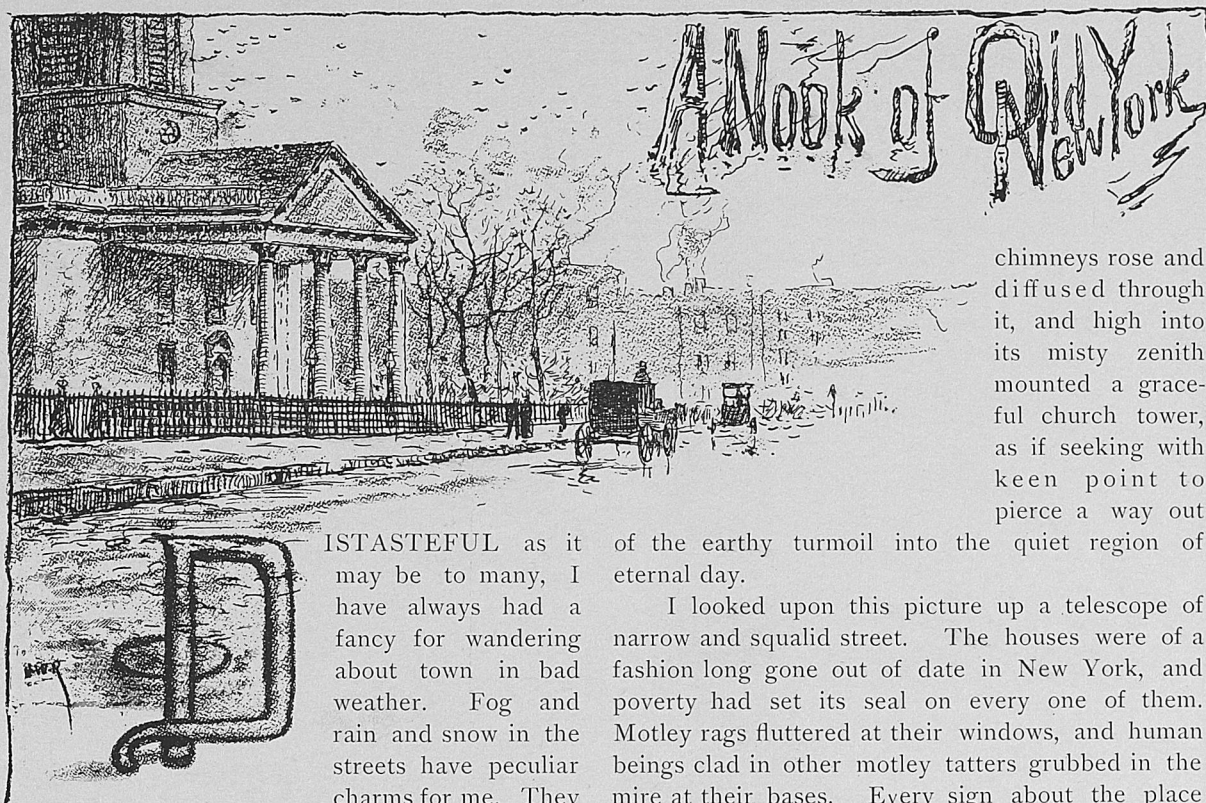
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# AMERICAN ART.



chimneys rose and diffused through it, and high into its misty zenith mounted a graceful church tower, as if seeking with keen point to pierce a way out

ISTASTEFUL as it may be to many, I have always had a fancy for wandering about town in bad weather. Fog and rain and snow in the streets have peculiar charms for me. They

make pictures. They conceal what the sunshine reveals too much of, and reduce to charming masses details that have no charm. They cloak the harshnesses and the crudities created by man in a merciful mantle, and show you all that is worth seeing without offending your eye with what your æsthetic sensibility resents.

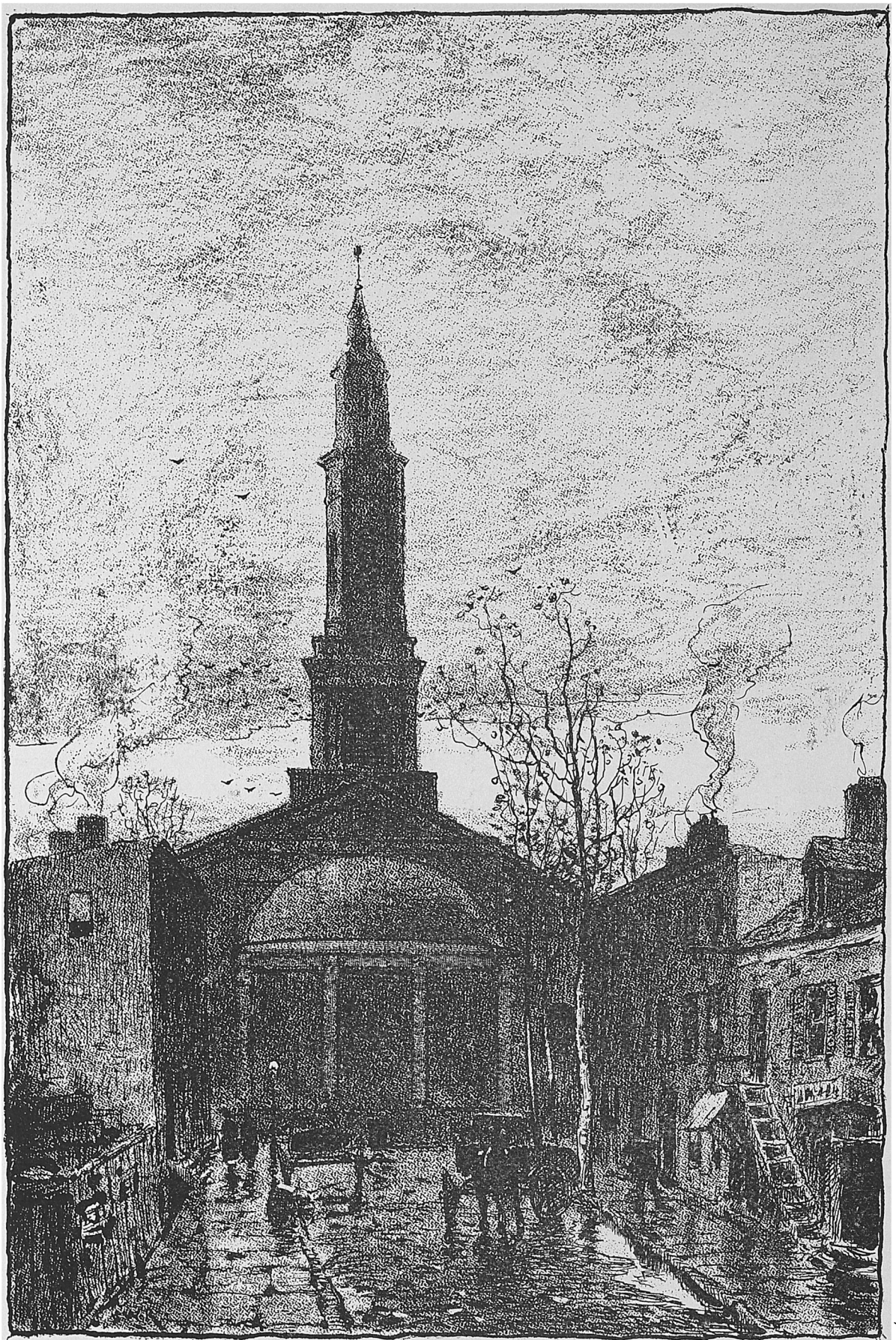
One morning last spring, while the country still lay asleep under a coverlid of white and the town was smothered in slush, I drifted, by what accident I know not, into one of the dirtiest and most dismal sections of New York. Overhead the elevated road trains roared, showering the street with a rain of molten rust and dripping grease; underfoot the mud lay ankle deep; in the street a tumultuous tangle of laden trucks and wagons crashed and volleyed their way along in contending currents, and at the turning of a street I got a glimpse of heaven.

It was a sky thick with mist, that smoked in billowing masses, just touched with opalescent light from the east, where the sun was fighting its way through the clouds. Black smoke from various

of the earthy turmoil into the quiet region of eternal day.

I looked upon this picture up a telescope of narrow and squalid street. The houses were of a fashion long gone out of date in New York, and poverty had set its seal on every one of them. Motley rags fluttered at their windows, and human beings clad in other motley tatters grubbed in the mire at their bases. Every sign about the place was that of misery and want, and the end of the forgotten thoroughfare was closed by the rear wall of a noble church to which the spire belonged. I ploughed through the mud to the iron door that barred the entrance to the crypt and found that the street was crossed by another equally wretched, foul and picturesque. But over the church wall that nature which man cannot build by hand reached out its green fingers and trailed the verdant borders of its robe, breaking the lines of iron, brick and stone, and giving the masonry, gray and cold with eld, a touch of springtide life.

Millions of New Yorkers who yearly pass the rear of St. John's Church glance at the dial to note the time and think no more of it. The policeman on the beat will tell you that it is not quite safe even in broad day to venture on an exploration of York street, with its rookeries infested with black and white bandits, the scum of the Italian and negro population of the town. But take my word for it, when you happen into the neighborhood, and assume the small risk of a dirty path to find out what the place is for yourselves, and I am sure you will



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH.

Drawn by H. W. RANGER.

agree with me that the trouble is worth the pains. You are on historic ground when you set your foot in this metropolitan slum.

St John's is one of the churches belonging to the great Trinity corporation. It ranks third on their list. After Trinity, on Broadway, facing Wall street, comes St. Paul's, at Fulton street, and after these St. John's, which lends to the Varick street of to-day its one redeeming trait of picturesqueness. Up to a generation ago St. John's faced a charming wooded park, the property of the Trinity corporation. All the land hereabouts was or is still owned by that church, and is a part of the old Anneke Jans farm. The neighborhood was sedately aristocratic. The park was girdled by the mansions of merchants and professional men, who worshipped under the roof of St. John's. It possessed one of the wealthiest and most exclusive social circles of the city, and now it is a region of tenements and warehouses, in which the church alone is a reminder of its past. The change came when Trinity sold the Park to Commodore Vanderbilt on which to build a freight depot for the Hudson River Railroad. When the brick and granite freight house went up the pride of St. John's park came down, and it was but a few years before its denizens had abandoned it to poverty and trade.

The church fronts on Varick street. It has a superb porch, with noble sustaining columns, and is reached over a flagged court defended by fence and gates. There is a schoolhouse at one side of it, and over its terraced approach you get a glimpse of an old-fashioned garden, down into which you go by a flight of sagging stone steps. The old rectory walls in the southern extremity of the yard.

St. John's was built in 1803. It is a beautiful example of the ecclesiastical architecture then in vogue with the established church of England. Its simplicity is not rigid. It is proportioned with grace

and sufficiently varied in detail to present an interesting front in spite of the general modesty of its style. In the slight sketches of the rear and front which I am enabled to give, this will, I hope, be sufficiently hinted at. The larger drawing is a sketch after a large water color which I made and the smaller is a hint at another picture that I have in mind.

The interior of the church carries out the suggestion of the exterior very completely. It is charming in the largeness of its conception and the symmetry and simple completeness of its finish. There broods within a mellow peacefulness that is a part of the place and of its history.

During the time that I was sketching around St. John's I got to notice a curious Saturday morning crowd that assembled at the door of the old rectory where the offices are. Inquiry as to the meaning of the gathering revealed to me one of the quaint and charming minor features of the place. These poor people were the beneficiaries of a long-forgotten but still active charity. The figure painter in search of a subject might find one every Saturday morning when the Leake dole of bread is dispensed. Nearly half a century ago that amiable old philanthropist, John Leake, left a bequest to provide a weekly benison of bread for the parish poor of the church he worshipped in, and some seventy good, solid loaves are regularly disbursed under this rule. The great town has hemmed in St. John's since good Esquire Leake said his honest prayers to his patron saint under its shadowy roof-tree; the fine old houses, in one of which he lived, have decayed into rookeries; where green trees rustled rise the grimmed and sordid walls of the Vanderbilt freight warehouse, and the clank and whistle of the dummy engine have supplanted the songs of birds. His charity is all the more sweet for these changes, I opine, and the more necessary.

*H. W. Ranger*

